

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

23 October 2017

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Powell, Lauren E. and Isler, Karin and Barton, Robert A. (2017) 'Re-evaluating the link between brain size and behavioural ecology in primates.', *Proceedings of the Royal Society series B : biological sciences.*, 284 (1865). p. 20171765.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2017.1765>

Publisher's copyright statement:

Additional information:

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Re-evaluating the link between brain size and behavioural ecology in primates

Lauren E Powell^{1*}, Karin Isler² & Robert A Barton^{1*}

¹ Evolutionary Anthropology Research Group, Department of Anthropology, University of Durham,
South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, UK

² Department of Anthropology, University of Zürich-Irchel, Winterthurerstr. 190, Zürich, CH-8057,
Switzerland

*Corresponding authors

Contact details:

Lauren E Powell: l.e.powell@durham.ac.uk

Lauren Powell ORCID: 0000-0002-2041-5436

Robert A Barton: r.a.barton@durham.ac.uk

Robert Barton ORCID: 0000-0002-2150-9637

Re-evaluating the link between brain size and behavioural ecology in primates

Keywords: brain size; primate; ecology; group size; home range

Abstract

Comparative studies have identified a wide range of behavioural and ecological correlates of relative brain size, with results differing between taxonomic groups, and even within them. In primates for example, recent studies contradict one another over whether social or ecological factors are critical. A basic assumption of such studies is that with sufficiently large samples and appropriate analysis, robust correlations indicative of selection pressures on cognition will emerge. We carried out a comprehensive re-examination of correlates of primate brain size using two large comparative datasets and phylogenetic comparative methods. We found evidence in both datasets for associations between brain size and ecological variables (home range size, diet, and activity period), but little evidence for an effect of social group size, a correlation which has previously formed the empirical basis of the Social Brain Hypothesis. However, reflecting divergent results in the literature, our results exhibited instability across datasets, even when they were matched for species composition and predictor variables. We identify several potential empirical and theoretical difficulties underlying this instability and suggest that these issues raise doubts about inferring cognitive selection pressures from behavioural correlates of brain size.

19 Introduction

20 Absolute brain size varies almost a thousand-fold across the order Primates (1), and the
21 adaptive significance of this variation has been the subject of intense interest. As neural tissue
22 imposes costs (2), evolutionary increases in brain size are assumed to confer benefits in terms
23 of enhanced cognitive abilities (3,4). Although this assumption has received support from
24 studies demonstrating positive associations between brain size and cognitive performance (5–
25 9), the selection pressures responsible are still poorly understood.

26 A classic approach to this problem is to examine which specific aspects of lifestyle correlate
27 with brain size across species. In primates, two broad categories of hypothesis have been
28 tested in this way; ecological and social. Ecological hypotheses mainly relate to the foraging
29 demands of a species' ecological niche (10–13). Effects of diet (14–20), home range size
30 (13,19,21), terrestriality (22) and activity period (23,24) on brain or brain component size have
31 been reported, and explanations for such effects invoke a range of information-processing
32 capacities, including spatial or spatio-temporal memory and visual processing (19,23,25,26). In
33 contrast, the Social Brain Hypothesis (SBH) proposes that the principal selection pressure
34 responsible for variation in primate brain size is the cognitive demands of managing social
35 relationships within bonded groups (27–32), a hypothesis that has received considerable
36 empirical support (30–32). Relationships between sociality and brain size have also been
37 reported in other mammalian taxa such as Ungulates (33,34) and Carnivora (14,34–36).

38 However, some studies have failed to find a statistical link between brain size and sociality
39 (14,19,20,36), and apparent exceptions, in terms of large-brained but not conspicuously social
40 taxa, suggest that factors other than sociality may have been influential (14,37,38). In
41 particular, a recent analysis by DeCasien et al. (20) found that diet, and not social group size,
42 correlates with brain size in primates. DeCasien et al. point to several possible explanations for

the correlation with diet that invoke the cognitive basis of foraging skills. Shultz & Dunbar (34) had earlier acknowledged that primate brain size correlates with diet, but argued (a) that this reflects energetic constraints on brain size rather than selection on foraging skills, and (b) that brain size correlates with sociality independently of diet. The regression models supporting the latter conclusion were based on relatively small sample sizes, and, using a larger sample size, DeCasien et al. (20) failed to find an independent effect of social group size after accounting for body size and diet, as well as for phylogenetic uncertainty. On the other hand, Shultz and Dunbar (34) incorporated a wider range of ecological variables into their model. Here we combine the strengths of these studies and evaluate the possible effects of their use of different data sets; that is, we use phylogenetic comparative analysis applied to large sample sizes, we incorporate all the key behavioural-ecological predictors examined in previous studies, and we account for phylogenetic uncertainty. Although error variance in predictors theoretically has a major impact on the results of regression analyses, and is likely to be considerable in the case of behavioural measures collated from field studies conducted by different researchers using different methods on different populations, almost nothing is known about the effects of this problem on determining the behavioural correlates of brain size. A novel feature of our study is therefore that we assess the robustness of results by replicating analyses across datasets. A lack of such robustness would have significant implications for attempts to infer selection pressures from analyses that neglect this issue.

Materials and Methods

Data sources

Brain size (endocranial volume) and body mass were obtained from previously published compilations (18,39–41). Whilst it might be argued that the SBH specifically invokes the

67 neocortex as the relevant brain structure (31–33), proponents of the SBH refer to the
68 hypothesis as an explanation for brain size and have used both overall brain and neocortex size
69 (33,42) arguing that brain size and neocortex size are closely related, because the neocortex
70 comprises a large proportion of whole brain volume (34,43). Using brain size markedly
71 increases sample sizes and statistical power. Nevertheless, we recognise that these two
72 measures could theoretically give different results (see Discussion).

73 Two datasets on primate behavioural ecology were analysed. The first (hereafter referred to
74 as ‘dataset 1’) is a previously unpublished dataset compiled from the literature by KI, providing
75 updated, high quality data on primate behavioural ecology; favouring wild samples over
76 captive, larger samples over smaller, original contributions over compilations, and more recent
77 sources over older ones (see Electronic Supplementary Material 2 for data and sources)
78 (18,39–41). For sexually dimorphic species (size difference > 10%), female values for
79 endocranial volume (hereafter “ECV”) and body mass were used. For all other species, means
80 were calculated across males and females. If available, body mass was taken from the same
81 specimens as ECV. Otherwise, the largest available sample of wild body mass data was used.
82 Dataset 1 includes information on diet composition (the percentage of time spent feeding on
83 different dietary items), size of sleeping groups and of foraging groups, day ranges, and home
84 range sizes. Dataset 2 was compiled from the literature by Nunn and van Schaik (44). It
85 provides values for female body mass, activity period, substrate use, and diet. As body size in
86 dataset 2 is derived only from female specimens, for comparability we also ran an analysis on
87 dataset 1 using only female body size estimates (Electronic Supplementary Material 1 (ESM1),
88 Table S13). Datasets 1 and 2 are not independent, as their sources overlap. Therefore, in order
89 to test for robustness of results across strictly independent datasets, we also created subsets
90 of the data by randomly selecting different species from each original dataset.

Selection of ecological variables

Five behavioural-ecological variables were selected for analysis, based on the previous literature (19,21,25,30,31,45,46): two continuous variables (home range size (ha) and social group size) and three dichotomous categorical variables: activity period (nocturnal/diurnal, substrate use (terrestrial/arboreal) and diet (folivore/non folivore). Rather than presenting quantitative estimates, Nunn and van Schaik (44) classified species' diet categories based on the food type that occupied the largest proportion of feeding time. We therefore used the same criterion to categorise diet in dataset 2. However, diet is subject to marked intraspecific variation in relation to seasonal and local differences in the relative abundance of different food types (47). Hence, categorising species' diet according to percentage of feeding time can create anomalies, in which closely related species with similar foraging niches are placed in different categories due simply to the quantitative estimates being based on insufficient or inaccurate samples. We therefore ran an additional separate analysis for dataset 1 in which folivores were more strictly defined as only those species with clear physiological specialisations for folivory (ESM1, S16) (48,49). As in previous analyses (11,23,24), diurnal species were defined as those that regularly forage and are active during the day, therefore including the few cathemeral lemurs which are more diurnal than their strictly nocturnal close relatives (50,51).

Selection of group size data

Dataset 2 (44) provides both 'population group size' and 'foraging group size'. The authors define population group size as "...the animals that come together frequently, usually to sleep together and among which foraging units have highly overlapping ranges." (p. 202), whereas foraging group sizes include the smaller, temporary parties or subgroups that form in response to immediate daily foraging conditions. Since the SBH relates to communities of individuals that associate habitually, we used population group size from Dataset 2. Dataset 1 (52) recorded

both sleeping and foraging group size. A third group size measure (“Combi Group Size”) takes the largest of the sleeping and foraging group figures. Combi Group Size therefore reflects the number of individuals who regularly associate, and is thus essentially definitionally the same as population group size from Dataset 2. We therefore used Combi Group Size in our primary analyses of dataset 1. However, we also reran the analyses with sleeping group size only (where available) and found no qualitative difference in results (see ESM1, Table S12). While group size may be a relatively indirect measure of primate social complexity (46,53), it is the one that forms the foundation of work on the SBH (31,46), and as we intended to revisit the conclusions of that work it is necessary to use the same metrics as used in those papers.

Statistical Analysis

Both analyses used the same endocranial volume data; only the behavioural-ecological data differed. Dataset 1 and the R code used in this study are available in the electronic supplementary material (ESM2 and ESM3 respectively). We used phylogenetic generalised least squares regression (PGLS) to analyse the correlated evolution of the five behavioural-ecological variables and endocranial volume. Data were analysed in the R (54) packages “ape”(55), “picante”(56), “caper”(57) and “nlme”(58). Pagel’s λ (59) is a scaling parameter, used to scale the variance co-variance matrix according to the expected variance given a phylogenetic tree, thus accounting for the confounding effect of phylogenetic relatedness in comparative studies (60). λ was estimated by maximum likelihood. For the PGLS analyses, the phylogeny used was the consensus tree incorporating branch length estimates from the 10k Trees project (61). Body mass was included as a covariate in the regression to control for its effects on endocranial volume following Freckleton (62), Smith (63), and Garcia-Berthou (64). This method of body size correction is preferred over analysis of residuals as it avoids biased parameter estimates (62). Including body mass as a covariate also has the benefit of controlling

for any effects of body mass on other predictors, which is likely to be a particular issue for home range size. The granularity of the environment as perceived by the animal is likely to be dependent upon its size. For example, an increase of 1 hectare would likely have very different implications for a 50g mouse lemur than for an 85kg gorilla.

All continuous variables (endocranial volume, body mass, group size, and home range size) were log₁₀ transformed prior to analysis to satisfy the assumption of normality. Prior to the analysis, we inspected the distribution of the response and predictor variables and found them to be approximately symmetrically distributed. We inspected diagnostic plots for the model and found no evidence of violation of the assumptions of normality or homogeneity of residuals (65). Models were checked for outliers with a studentised residual with an absolute value >3 (66). None were found. We checked for collinearity between predictors in our models. Although statistically significant partial correlations were present for all predictors, none were above 0.67. Absolute correlations of less than .8 are deemed not to represent significant collinearity issues (67). Variance inflation factors (VIFs) (65) were less than 1.4 in all cases which further reassured us that collinearity was not a significant problem in this case (68).

Model comparisons

To assess the fit of the PGLS models, we constructed models which varied in complexity; from an allometric model in which body size was the sole predictor, models including body size and each predictor alone, and then added parameters to the model according to their p value (low to high). We then compared the AIC (Akaike's Information Criterion) (69) for each model using the native "AIC" function in R (54). The AIC takes in to account the size of the sample and the number of predictors; penalising complex, over-paramaterised models (65). Lower values of the AIC indicate better fitting, more parsimonious models. We also used log likelihood ratio tests (70), run using the "lrtest" function in the lmttest package (71) in R (54).

Accounting for phylogenetic uncertainty

The PGLS analyses are based on a single consensus tree of the primates, but phylogenetic relationships are not known with certainty. To account for this issue and to additionally test whether this potential source of error in comparative studies has a significant impact on identifying correlates of brain size, we performed Bayesian phylogenetic regressions (72) accounting for shared ancestry by integrating over a posterior sample of 1000 primate phylogenetic trees taken from the 10k trees project website (61). We conducted these analyses using BayesTraitsV3 (73). To account for the level of phylogenetic signal in our data we estimated the tree scaling parameter λ (73). We used a uniform prior of -100 to 100 for all regression coefficients and a uniform prior of 0 to 1 for λ . We ran the analyses for 1,010,000 iterations, sampling every 1000 iterations removing the first 100,000 iterations as burn-in. To determine the significance of our regression coefficients we used pMCMC values which can be interpreted in a similar way to frequentist p-values (74).

Results

PGLS

(Table 1)

Table 1 presents the results of PGLS analyses on the two full datasets. In all cases λ was close to 1, indicating that the data are consistent with a Brownian motion model of trait evolution (75). A simple allometric model regressing endocranial volume on body size alone explained 77% of the variation in dataset 1 and 73% in dataset 2. The full model (comprising all five behavioural-ecological variables) was highly significant in both dataset 1 ($\lambda=0.99$, $r^2=0.8$, $p < 0.0001$) and dataset 2 ($\lambda=1$, $r^2=.75$, $p < 0.0001$).

In dataset 1 home range size and activity period were both associated with endocranial volume after accounting for the effects of body size (positive associations between brain size and HRS

and diurnality respectively) ($\lambda=0.99$, $t_{6,108}=2.1$, $p < 0.05$). The model based on dataset 2 (52) also showed a significant positive partial correlation with home range size, ($\lambda=0.99$, $t_{6,97}=2.8$, $p < 0.01$), but the partial correlations with activity period did not reach significance ($p=0.06$), and no other behavioural-ecological variables were significantly correlated with brain size while accounting for these effects.

(Table 2)

When each dataset was matched to include the same species and the same endocranial volume data, results changed, and again differed between datasets. Table 2 indicates significant partial correlations for diet in dataset 1 and for home range size in dataset 2. In both cases, the effect of activity period was now non-significant.

We next performed PGLS analyses on the datasets (i) after they had been made completely independent from each other, and (ii) after they had been reduced to include only species that appeared in Stephan et al.'s 1981 brain component volumes dataset (76). Again, results differed between the datasets and from the results reported above (see ESM1, tables S4 and S9 for full results). Folivory showed a significant negative association with brain size in independent dataset 1, whereas there were no significant predictors after accounting for body mass in independent dataset 2. Similarly, no significant associations were found in the full multiple regressions on either dataset when they were matched to the Stephan et al. (76) species list. However, because the sample sizes in these analyses were small relative to the number of predictors, we used model comparisons to determine which combinations of predictors are best supported (see below).

Model Comparison

To establish which combination of variables model endocranial volume best in each dataset, we employed a model comparison approach using Akaike's Information Criterion (69) and log

211 likelihood ratio tests (70). We first subjected the full datasets to model comparison (ESM1,
212 Tables S2 & S3).

213 AIC values indicate that the model offering the best and most parsimonious explanation of
214 dataset 1 was one which included activity period, home range size, diet and group size. (model
215 ix, Table S2). Following Burnham and Anderson (2002) (70), an AIC difference (Δ_i) of less than
216 2 was considered to indicate substantial empirical support (p. 70). The best model was
217 therefore not a significantly better fit to the data than models vii, viii and x ($\Delta_i < 2$). AIC
218 differences between the models fitted to dataset 2 (Table S3) showed that a model containing
219 home range size and activity period was the best fit to the data, but model vi which included
220 only body size (the covariate) and home range size provided a comparable fit ($\Delta_i < 2$). Model
221 viii (home range size, activity period and terrestriality) also gave a comparable fit according to
222 the $\Delta_i < 2$ rule, but a log likelihood ratio test showed that this addition of terrestriality did not
223 significantly improve the fit (Table S3). In summary, these results show that endocranial volume
224 is best modelled by different combinations of variables in the two datasets. Home Range Size
225 was consistently present in the best models ($\Delta_i < 2$) across the two datasets, appearing in all
226 seven of the best models. Group size appeared in only two of the seven best models and only
227 when accompanied by home range size, folivory and activity period.

228 As described above, the inclusion of different species in each dataset may result in the
229 composition of the best models varying between datasets. We therefore also subjected the
230 species matched datasets to model comparison, as detailed in Tables S5 and S6 in ESM1.

231 The model comparisons for the species matched datasets show broad agreement with those
232 of the non-matched, full datasets in Tables S2 and S3. The best models still consistently included
233 home range size, appearing in every model with substantial support (i.e. where $\Delta_i < 2$) save one

(model viii, Table S5). Group size appeared in only one of the best models, again together with home range size, folivory and activity period.

PGLS model comparisons for the Stephan et al.(76) sample of species identified social group size as a significant predictor: in both datasets, group size and folivory were included in the best model. The addition of home range size was found not to improve the fit in either dataset (Tables S10 and S11, ESM1).

Accounting for phylogenetic uncertainty

A Bayesian phylogenetic regression of the full datasets replicated the qualitative results of the PGLS analyses. In dataset 1, Home range size (posterior mean = 0.0247, 95%CI = 0.0241 to 0.0253, pMCMC=0.0066) and activity period (posterior mean=0.1327, 95%CI = 0.1293 to 0.262, pMCMC=0.0154) both had pMCMC values of less than 0.05 (Table S14), indicating that these traits are well supported (73). Home range size was the only predictor with strong support in dataset 2 (posterior mean=0.0426, 95%CI = 0.0416 to 0.0436, pMCMC = 0.0007, Table S15). Figures S14a, S14b and S15 in ESM1 show the posterior distributions of estimates of those traits that had pMCMC < 0.05.

Discussion

We have re-examined the correlates of brain size in primates, using two large comparative datasets, and incorporating multiple potentially relevant behavioural variables within phylogenetic statistical models. Our results indicate that, even holding constant statistical methods, phylogeny, set of predictor variables, response variable data, and species sample, the behavioural and ecological correlates of brain size are sensitive to the use of different predictor datasets. Accounting for phylogenetic uncertainty did not affect this outcome.

258 This lack of robustness raises doubts about inferences from behavioural-ecological correlates
259 of brain size based on analyses of single datasets, and may help to explain divergent results
260 between studies. To the extent that we find stability, there is stronger evidence for correlations
261 with ecological factors, notably home range size, than for social group size, as found in Clutton-
262 Brock and Harvey's pioneering study (17). Our results are also broadly in line with the more
263 recent study of DeCasien et al. (20), in finding stronger and more robust associations with
264 ecological factors related to foraging than with social group. However, our inclusion of
265 additional variables and datasets also reveals differences. DeCasien et al. identified frugivorous
266 diets as the key correlate of large brain size, but did not examine home range size. In contrast,
267 we found home range size rather than diet to be the most consistent correlate of brain size,
268 but note that this varied between datasets, suggesting their effects are hard to separate,
269 perhaps because diet and ranging together form an adaptive 'syndrome': more frugivorous
270 and (less folivorous) diets are strongly associated with more patchily distributed resources and
271 larger home ranges (44) . The manner in which diet is categorised also appears to have an
272 impact; when only species with biological adaptations to leaf processing are classified as
273 folivorous, diet additionally becomes a significant predictor of brain size (ESM1; S16a&b). We
274 also found some evidence for an association between activity period and large brain size,
275 though this effect was small and variable across datasets, the potential reasons for which we
276 discuss below.

277 Evidence for a correlation between brain size and social group size after accounting for effects
278 of other variables was weak. We found that this well-known correlation appears largely
279 dependent on the particular sample of species in the Stephan dataset (76). One elaboration of
280 the Social Brain Hypothesis accounts for dietary correlates of brain size in primates as a
281 reflection of energetic constraints (31,34,43) . In this view, sociality selects for bigger brains

and diet must become more frugivorous to provide the additional energy required to meet the costs. However, this hypothesis would presumably predict stronger correlations with diet than with home range size, which we do not find. In addition, we do not find support for the claim that social group size and brain size are robustly correlated after accounting for the effects of ecological variables (34,43). We agree with Dunbar & Shultz (43) that, in principle, comparative analysis should differentiate between selection pressures and constraints, but it remains unclear how this can be achieved in practice. While path analysis has been suggested as a possible solution (31,43), it is essentially a protocol for arranging a set of regression coefficients according to some causal hypotheses; it cannot be used to discover causality from correlational data (77), it cannot solve the problem of instability across datasets, and it is as vulnerable to underlying issues with the data as are the regression analyses on which it is based. In summary, while it remains plausible that sociality is related to cognitive evolution in primates, we suggest that this can no longer be claimed on the basis of a strong or robust correlation between brain size and group size that remains after controlling for other variables.

Why are results unstable, and what implications does this have for using them to infer selection on cognitive abilities? We highlight three empirical issues (data quality, statistical power and intrinsic intra-specific variability) as well as theoretical difficulties with brain size as a global measure of cognitive capacities. Data quality and replicability are major issues for comparative studies because of the diversity of sources and of the methods used by different researchers to collect the primary data (78–80). Furthermore, many behaviours vary extensively within and between populations of the same species, and comparative studies routinely collapse this intra-specific variation into species-specific means. The validity of these mean values depends on the extent to which the variation has been sampled to a comparable extent across species, and on the assumption that inter-specific variation is substantial by comparison. For example, group

size in different populations of terrestrial or semi-terrestrial cercopithecine species varies widely, depending on habitat, reflecting facultative adjustment of behaviour to local ecological conditions. Group size in yellow baboons (*Papio cynocephalus*) was found to vary between 8 and 44 within one study population (81); the contrasts between *Papio* populations or sub-species is even more marked, with estimates of group size varying approximately 20-fold (82) and of home range size approximately 100-fold (83). Phylogenetic methods which control for intra-specific variation by incorporating the uncertainty in to the error term are now available (84). Future work could exploit this development, if and when sufficient reliable data for sampling intraspecific variance become available for a large sample of species. However, this would in one sense only make the problem we have highlighted worse: the inflation of error terms that inevitably result can be expected to reduce the likelihood of finding significant correlations. The point we wish to emphasise here, however, is that current inferences in the literature about the selection pressures driving the evolution of brain size made using the standard approach of analysing single datasets appear to be unreliable. This point has important implications both for interpreting the existing literature, and for the design of future studies. Where variables are prone to measurement error and/or extensive intraspecific variation, such as is particularly likely to be the case with many behavioural variables, we recommend careful attention to data quality, testing the stability of results across datasets and/or incorporation of uncertainty in estimation of species-typical mean values.

In addition, statistical power is a serious issue where a range of predictors are considered with moderate or small numbers of species, as is not uncommonly the case in published comparative studies. In this situation (model overfitting) we can expect models with high coefficients of determination but poor generalizability from one dataset to another. This is a particular issue with the relatively small dataset of Stephan et al. (76), which has been the main

empirical foundation for the claim that social group size is the strongest predictor of brain and/or neocortex size (30,31,85,43). When datasets 1 and 2 were matched to the species in the Stephan et al. data, the best models identified by our model comparisons did include group size (ESM1, Tables S10a – S11b), in contrast with our results for the larger datasets. Hence, in accord with the suggestion of Parker that this dataset may be biased in favour of the SBH (13), we recover a clear correlation with group size only when analysis is restricted to these species. It therefore seems that the differences in patterns of correlations between studies (20,31) are at least partly due to different species sampling and/or different predictor variables, rather than simply to use of different brain measures (overall brain size versus neocortex size).

The fact that an effect of home range size emerges through two different types of analysis and two different (albeit not independent) datasets may make it tempting to interpret ranging as the “true” correlate of primate brain size, and to suggest, as others have done, that large brains reflect selection on spatial memory (33,86). We, however, urge caution in this respect. First, we cannot unambiguously separate the effects of home range size, diet and activity period. Second, and in our view more importantly, overall brain size does not necessarily reflect the ways in which different selection pressures acted on different neural systems (3,23,87). For example, we found evidence that diurnality is associated with larger brains, but this result was weak and lacking consistency across datasets. Evolutionary transitions between nocturnal and diurnal niches are known to correlate with the relative size of visual and olfactory brain regions (23). Crucially, visual and olfactory regions show opposite evolutionary patterns (the former being relatively large and the latter relatively small in diurnal species) , so that overall brain size fails to adequately capture the influence of sensory niche on information-processing capacities (23). In this case, the relatively weak and variable effects of activity period on overall brain size can only be interpreted by understanding the divergent responses of underlying neural

systems. Similarly, recent evidence reveals a striking difference in the pattern of brain component evolution in apes compared to other anthropoid primates, with increased cerebellar relative to cortical expansion in the former (75). These different neural causes of brain size variation in different clades can be presumed to have different cognitive implications, presenting a difficulty for the attempt to relate overall brain size to individual selection pressures (3) or to some general cognitive ability. While large brain regions such as the mammalian neocortex and avian pallium inevitably have a relatively strong impact on overall brain size (88), these components themselves consist of multiple functional systems that evolve in a mosaic fashion in response to different selection pressures (23,88–93). Making sense of the behavioural and ecological correlates of brain size will therefore depend on the difficult task of understanding the complex and clade-specific ways in which brain size reflects variation in specific neural systems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Chris Venditti for his invaluable advice on Bayesian Methods, the Primatology discussion group at the University of Durham for advice on drafts, and the AnthroTree workshop at Duke University, North Carolina for providing training in phylogenetic methods for LP.

Bibliography

- 372 1. Barton RA. Embodied cognitive evolution and the cerebellum. *Philos Trans R Soc B Biol Sci.*
373 2012 Aug;367(1599):2097–107.
- 374 2. Aiello LC, Wheeler P. The Expensive-Tissue Hypothesis: The Brain and the Digestive System in
375 Human and Primate Evolution. *Curr Anthropol.* 1995;36(2):199.
- 376 3. Healy SD, Rowe C. A critique of comparative studies of brain size. *Proc R Soc B Biol Sci.* 2007
377 Feb;274(1609):453–64.
- 378 4. Weisbecker V, Blomberg S, Goldizen AW, Brown M, Fisher D. The evolution of relative brain
379 size in marsupials is energetically constrained but not driven by behavioral complexity. *Brain*
380 *Behav Evol.* 2015 Jan;85(2):125–35.
- 381 5. MacLean EL, Hare B, Nunn CL, Addessi E, Amici F, Anderson RC, et al. The evolution of self-
382 control. *Proc Natl Acad Sci.* 2014;111(20):E2140–E2148.
- 383 6. Benson-Amram S, Dantzer B, Stricker G, Swanson EM, Holekamp KE. Brain size predicts
384 problem-solving ability in mammalian carnivores. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A.* 2016 Mar
385 1;113(9):2532–7.
- 386 7. Kotrschal A, Rogell B, Bundsen A, Svensson B, Zajitschek S, Brännström I, et al. Artificial
387 selection on relative brain size in the guppy reveals costs and benefits of evolving a larger
388 brain. *Curr Biol.* 2013 Jan 21;23(2):168–71.
- 389 8. Kotrschal A, Corral-Lopez A, Amcoff M, Kolm N. A larger brain confers a benefit in a spatial
390 mate search learning task in male guppies. *Behav Ecol.* 2015;26(2):527–32.
- 391 9. MacLean EL, Matthews LJ, Hare BA, Nunn CL, Anderson RC, Aureli F, et al. How does cognition
392 evolve? Phylogenetic comparative psychology. *Anim Cogn.* 2012 Mar;15(2):223–38.
- 393 10. Mars RB, Neubert F-X, Verhagen L, Sallet J, Miller KL, Dunbar RIM, et al. Primate comparative
394 neuroscience using magnetic resonance imaging: promises and challenges. *Front Neurosci.*
395 2014 Jan 6;8:298.
- 396 11. Barton RA. Primate brain evolution: Integrating comparative, neurophysiological, and
397 ethological data. *Evol Anthropol Issues, News, Rev.* 2006 Dec 22;15(6):224–36.
- 398 12. Harvey PH, Rambaut A. Comparative analyses for adaptive radiations. *PhilTrans R Soc Lond B.*
399 2000;355(1403):1599–605.
- 400 13. Parker ST. Re-evaluating the extractive foraging hypothesis. *New Ideas Psychol.* 2015
401 Feb;37:1–12.
- 402 14. Swanson EM, Holekamp KE, Lundrigan BL, Arsznov BM, Sakai ST. Multiple Determinants of
403 Whole and Regional Brain Volume among Terrestrial Carnivorans. *PLoS One.* 2012 Jun;7(6).
- 404 15. Walker R, Burger O, Wagner J, Von Rueden CR. Evolution of brain size and juvenile periods in
405 primates. *J Hum Evol.* 2006 Nov;51(5):480–9.
- 406 16. Harvey PH, Clutton-Brock TH, Mace GM. Brain size and ecology in small mammals and
407 primates. *Proc Natl Acad Sci.* 1980 Jul 1;77(7):4387–9.
- 408 17. Fish JL, Lockwood CA. Dietary constraints on encephalization in primates. *Am J Phys Anthropol.*
409 2003;120(2):171–81.

- 410 18. van Woerden JT, van Schaik CP, Isler K. Effects of Seasonality on Brain Size Evolution: Evidence
411 from Strepsirrhine Primates. *Am Nat.* 2010 Dec;176(6):758–67.
- 412 19. Clutton-Brock TH, Harvey PH. Primates, brains and ecology. *J Zool.* 1980 Aug 20;190(3):309–
413 23.
- 414 20. DeCasien AR, Williams SA, Higham JP, Vines K, P. C. Primate brain size is predicted by diet but
415 not sociality. *Nat Ecol Evol.* 2017 Mar 27;1(5):112.
- 416 21. Milton K, May ML. Body weight, diet and home range area in primates. *Nature.*
417 1976;259(5543):459–62.
- 418 22. Sawaguchi T. Relative brain size, stratification, and social structure in anthropoids. *Primates.*
419 1990 Apr;31(2):257–72.
- 420 23. Barton RA, Purvis A, Harvey PH. Evolutionary Radiation of Visual and Olfactory Brain Systems in
421 Primates, Bats and Insectivores. *Philos Trans R Soc London Ser B Biol Sci.* 1995
422 Jun;348(1326):381–92.
- 423 24. Barton RA. Neocortex size and behavioural ecology in primates. *Proc Biol Sci.* 1996
424 Feb;263(1367):173–7.
- 425 25. Milton K. Foraging behaviour and the evolution of primate intelligence. In: Byrne RW, Whiten
426 A, editors. *Machiavellian intelligence: Social expertise and the evolution of intellect in*
427 *monkeys, apes, and humans.* New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press; 1988. p.
428 285–305.
- 429 26. Barton RA. Visual specialization and brain evolution in primates. *Proc R Soc London B Biol Sci.*
430 1998;265(1409).
- 431 27. Whiten A, Byrne RW. Tactical deception in primates. *Behav Brain Sci.* 1988;11:233–73.
- 432 28. Jolly A. Lemur social behavior and primate intelligence. *Science.* 1966 Jul 29;153(735):501–6.
- 433 29. Humphrey NK. The social function of intellect. In: Bateson PPG, Hindle RA, editors. *Growing*
434 *Points in Ethology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1976. p. 303–17.
- 435 30. Dunbar RIM. Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates. *J Hum Evol.* 1992 Jun
436 1;22(6):469–93.
- 437 31. Dunbar RIM, Shultz S. Evolution in the Social Brain. *Science* (80-). 2007 Sep;317(5843):1344–7.
- 438 32. Barton R, Dunbar RIM. Evolution of the social brain. In: *Machiavellian intelligence II.* 1997. p.
439 240–63.
- 440 33. Shultz S, Dunbar RIM. Both social and ecological factors predict ungulate brain size. *Proc Biol*
441 *Sci.* 2006 Jan 22;273(1583):207–15.
- 442 34. Shultz S, Dunbar RIM. The evolution of the social brain: anthropoid primates contrast with
443 other vertebrates. *Proc Biol Sci.* 2007 Oct 7;274(1624):2429–36.
- 444 35. Pérez-Barbería FJ, Shultz S, Dunbar RIM. Evidence for coevolution of sociality and relative brain
445 size in three orders of mammals. *Evolution.* 2007 Dec;61(12):2811–21.
- 446 36. Holekamp KE, Dantzer B, Stricker G, Shaw Yoshida KC, Benson-Amram S. Brains, brawn and
447 sociality: a hyaena's tale. *Anim Behav.* 2015;(Special Issue: Social Evolution):1–12.
- 448 37. van Schaik CP, Isler K, Burkart JM, Schaik CP van, Isler K, Burkart JM. Explaining brain size
449 variation: from social to cultural brain. *Trends Cogn Sci.* 2012 May;16(5):277–84.

- 450 38. Byrne RW. Parsing Behaviour: A Mundane Origin for an Extraordinary Ability? *Roots Hum Soc*
451 *Cult Cogn Interact*. 2006;478–505.
- 452 39. Isler K, Christopher Kirk E, Miller JMA, Albrecht GA, Gelvin BR, Martin RD. Endocranial volumes
453 of primate species: scaling analyses using a comprehensive and reliable data set. *J Hum Evol*.
454 2008 Dec;55(6):967–78.
- 455 40. van Woerden JT, Willems EP, van Schaik CP, Isler K. Large brains buffer energetic effects of
456 seasonal habitats in catarrhine primates. *Evolution (N Y)*. 2012;66(1):191–9.
- 457 41. van Woerden JT, van Schaik CP, Isler K. Brief Communication: Seasonality of diet composition
458 is related to brain size in New World Monkeys. *Am J Phys Anthropol*. 2014 Aug 1;154(4):628–
459 32.
- 460 42. Shultz S, Dunbar R. Encephalization is not a universal macroevolutionary phenomenon in
461 mammals but is associated with sociality. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2010 Dec
462 14;107(50):21582–6.
- 463 43. Dunbar RIM, Shultz S. Why are there so many explanations for primate brain evolution? *Philos*
464 *Trans R Soc London B Biol Sci*. 2017;372(1727).
- 465 44. Nunn CL, van Schaik CP. A Comparative Approach to Reconstructing the Socioecology of
466 Extinct Primates. In: Plavcan JM, Kay RF, Jungers WL, van Schaik CP, editors. *Reconstructing*
467 *Behavior in the Primate Fossil Record*. Boston, MA: Springer US; 2002. p. 159–215.
- 468 45. Robert A. Barton. The evolutionary ecology of the primate brain. In: Lee PC, editor.
469 *Comparative Primate Socioecology*. Cambridge University Press; 1999. p. 167.
- 470 46. Dunbar RIM. The social brain hypothesis. *Evol Anthropol Issues, News, Rev*. 1998;6(5):178–90.
- 471 47. Melin AD, Young HC, Mosdossy KN, Fedigan LM. Seasonality, extractive foraging and the
472 evolution of primate sensorimotor intelligence. *J Hum Evol*. 2014 Jun;71:77–86.
- 473 48. Chivers DJ, Hladik CM. Morphology of the gastrointestinal tract in primates : Comparisons with
474 other mammals in relation to diet. *J Morphol*. 1980;166(3):337–86.
- 475 49. Hladik CM. Adaptive strategies of primates in relation to leaf eating. In: Montgomery GG,
476 editor. *The Ecology of Arboreal Folivores*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press; 1978. p.
477 373–95.
- 478 50. Griffin RH, Matthews LJ, Nunn CL. Evolutionary disequilibrium and activity period in primates:
479 A bayesian phylogenetic approach. *Am J Phys Anthropol*. 2012 Mar;147(3):409–16.
- 480 51. Donati G, Santini L, Razafindramanana J, Boitani L, Borgognini-Tarli S. (Un-)expected nocturnal
481 activity in “Diurnal” *Lemur catta* supports cathemerality as one of the key adaptations of the
482 lemurid radiation. *Am J Phys Anthropol*. 2013 Jan;150(1):99–106.
- 483 52. Isler K. Unpublished dataset. Unpublished. University of Zurich;
- 484 53. Fischer J, Farnworth MS, Sennhenn-Reulen H, Hammerschmidt K. Quantifying social
485 complexity. *Anim Behav*. 2017 Aug;130:57–66.
- 486 54. R Development Core Team. R: A language and environment for statistical computing. Vienna,
487 Austria: R Foundation for Statistical Computing; 2015.
- 488 55. Paradis E, Claude J, Strimmer K. APE: Analyses of Phylogenetics and Evolution in R language.
489 *Bioinformatics*. 2004 Jan 20;20(2):289–90.
- 490 56. Kembel SW, Cowan PD, Helmus MR, Cornwell WK, Morlon H, Ackerly DD, et al. Picante: R tools

491 for integrating phylogenies and ecology. *Bioinformatics*. 2010 Jun 1;26(11):1463–4.

492 57. Orme D, Freckleton R, Thomas G, Petzoldt T, Fritz SA, Isaac N, et al. *caper: Comparative*
493 *Analyses of Phylogenetics and Evolution in R*. 2013.

494 58. Pinheiro J, Bates D, DebRoy S, Sarkar D, R Development Core Team. *{nlme}: Linear and*
495 *Nonlinear Mixed Effects Models*, R package version 3.1-122. 2015.

496 59. Pagel M. The Maximum Likelihood Approach to Reconstructing Ancestral Character States of
497 Discrete Characters on Phylogenies. *Syst Biol*. 1999 Sep;48(3):612–22.

498 60. Nunn CL. *The comparative approach in evolutionary anthropology and biology*. Chicago: The
499 University of Chicago Press; 2011. 380 p.

500 61. Arnold C, Matthews LJ, Nunn CL. The 10kTrees website: A new online resource for primate
501 phylogeny. *Evol Anthropol Issues, News, Rev*. 2010;19(3):114–118.

502 62. Freckleton RP. On the misuse of residuals in ecology: regression of residuals vs. multiple
503 regression. *J Anim Ecol*. 2002 May;71(3):542–5.

504 63. Smith RJ. Statistics of sexual size dimorphism. *J Hum Evol*. 1999;36(4):423–58.

505 64. Garcia-Berthou E. On the misuse of residuals in ecology: testing regression residuals vs. the
506 analysis of covariance. *J Anim Ecol*. 2001;70:708–11.

507 65. Quinn GP, Keough MJ. *Experimental Design and Data Analysis for Biologists*. Vol. 277,
508 *Experimental design and data analysis for biologists*. 2002. i.

509 66. Field A, Miles J, Field Z. *Discovering Statistics Using R*. Vol. 58, *Statistics*. 2012. 53-57 p.

510 67. Garland T. Can PGLS cope with collinearity between explanatory variables? [Internet]. [R-sig-
511 phylo] (Online forum comment). 2012 [cited 2015 Jan 5]. Available from: [http://www.mail-](http://www.mail-archive.com/r-sig-phylo@r-project.org/msg02093.html)
512 [archive.com/r-sig-phylo@r-project.org/msg02093.html](http://www.mail-archive.com/r-sig-phylo@r-project.org/msg02093.html)

513 68. Mundry R. Statistical issues and assumptions of phylogenetic generalized least squares. In:
514 *Modern Phylogenetic Comparative Methods and their Application in Evolutionary Biology*.
515 2014. p. 131–53.

516 69. Akaike H. A new look at the statistical model identification. *IEEE Trans Automat Contr*. 1974
517 Dec;19(6):716–23.

518 70. Burnham KP, Anderson DR. *Model Selection and Multimodel Inference - A Practical | Kenneth*
519 *P. Burnham | Springer. Springer Science & Business Media; 2002. 488 p.*

520 71. Zeileis A, Hothorn T. Diagnostic checking in Regression Relationships. *R News*. 2002;2(3):7–10.

521 72. Pagel M. Inferring the historical patterns of biological evolution. *Nature*. 1999
522 Oct;401(6756):877–84.

523 73. Pagel M, Meade A. *BayesTraits Manual (V3)* [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2017 May 18]. Available
524 from: <http://www.evolution.rdg.ac.uk/BayesTraitsV3/Files/BayesTraitsV3.Manual.pdf>

525 74. Hadfield JD. MCMC methods for multi-response generalized linear mixed models: the
526 MCMCglmm R package. *J Stat Softw*. 2010;33(2):1–22.

527 75. Robert A. Barton, Venditti C, Chris Venditti, Barton RA, Venditti C. Explosive evolution of the
528 cerebellum in humans and other great apes. *Curr Biol*. 2014;24(20).

529 76. Stephan H, Frahm H, Baron G. New and Revised Data on Volumes of Brain Structures in
530 Insectivores and Primates. *Folia Primatol*. 1981;35(1):1–29.

- 531 77. Denis DJ, Legerski J. Causal modeling and the Origins of Path Analysis. In: Annual Convention of
532 the American Psychological Association,. Toronto: ICAAP; 2003.
- 533 78. Patterson SK, Sandel AA, Miller JA, Mitani JC. Data Quality and the Comparative Method: The
534 Case of Primate Group Size. *Int J Primatol*. 2014 May 17;35(5):990–1003.
- 535 79. Borries C, Gordon AD, Koenig A, Catlett K, Schwartz G, Godfrey L, et al. Beware of Primate Life
536 History Data: A Plea for Data Standards and a Repository. Gursky-Doyen S, editor. *PLoS One*.
537 2013 Jun 24;8(6):e67200.
- 538 80. Borries C, Sandel AA, Koenig A, Fernandez-Duque E, Kamilar JM, Amoroso CR, et al.
539 Transparency, usability, and reproducibility: Guiding principles for improving comparative
540 databases using primates as examples. *Evol Anthropol Issues, News, Rev*. 2016 Sep;25(5):232–
541 8.
- 542 81. Stacey PB. Group size and foraging efficiency in yellow baboons. *Behav Ecol Sociobiol*. 1986
543 Jan;18(3):175–87.
- 544 82. Dunbar RIM. Time: A Hidden Constraint on the Behavioural Ecology of Baboons. *Behav Ecol*
545 *Sociobiol*. 1992;31:35–49.
- 546 83. Barton RA, Whiten A, Strum SC, Byrne RW, Simpson AJ. Habitat use and resource availability in
547 baboons. *Anim Behav*. 1992 May;43(5):831–44.
- 548 84. Ives AR, Midford PE, Garland T. Within-species variation and measurement error in
549 phylogenetic comparative methods. *Syst Biol*. 2007 Apr;56(2):252–70.
- 550 85. Kudo H, Dunbar RIM. Neocortex size and social network size in primates. *Anim Behav*. 2001
551 Oct;62(4):711–22.
- 552 86. Dunbar RIM, Shultz S. Understanding primate brain evolution. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol*
553 *Sci*. 2007 Apr 29;362(1480):649–58.
- 554 87. Barton RA, Harvey PH. Mosaic evolution of brain structure in mammals. *Nature*. 2000
555 Jun;405(6790):1055–8.
- 556 88. Sayol F, Lefebvre L, Sol D. Relative brain size and its relation with the associative pallium in
557 birds. *Brain Behav Evol*. 2016;87(2):69–77.
- 558 89. Montgomery SH, Mundy NI, Barton RA. Brain evolution and development: adaptation,
559 allometry and constraint. *Proc R Soc London B Biol Sci*. 2016;283(1838).
- 560 90. Moore JM, DeVoogd TJ. Concerted and mosaic evolution of functional modules in songbird
561 brains. *Proc R Soc London B Biol Sci*. 2017;284(1854).
- 562 91. Carlisle A, Selwood L, Hinds LA, Saunders N, Habgood M, Mardon K, et al. Testing hypotheses
563 of developmental constraints on mammalian brain partition evolution, using marsupials. *Sci*
564 *Rep*. 2017 Dec 26;7(1):4241.
- 565 92. Barton RA. Evolutionary specialization in mammalian cortical structure. *J Evol Biol*. 2007
566 Jul;20(4):1504–11.
- 567 93. Logan CJ, Avin S, Boogert N, Buskell A, Cross FR, Currie A, et al. Beyond Brain Size. *bioRxiv*.
568 2017;

Tables

Table 1: Phylogenetic Least Squares (PGLS) regressions examining the effects of five behavioural-ecological variables on endocranial volume.

	Dataset 1 (n=144)		Dataset 2 (n=104)	
Predictor	t_{137}	p	t_{97}	p
Intercept	-5.5	<0.001***	11.3	<0.001***
Body Size	18.6	<0.001***	13.3	<0.001***
Activity period	2.5	<0.05*	1.9	0.06
Terrestriality	0.4	0.69	-0.3	0.8
Folivory	-1.7	0.08	0.1	0.9
Group Size	1.7	0.1	0.1	0.9
Home Range Size	2.4	<0.05*	2.8	<0.01**
Model summary:				
λ		.988		.997
R^2		.8		.75

Table 2: Phylogenetic Least Squares (PGLS) regressions examining the effects of five behavioural-ecological variables on endocranial volume with datasets matched for species.

	Dataset 1 (n=99)		Dataset 2 (n=99)	
Predictor	t_{92}	p	t_{92}	p
Intercept	-5.8	<0.001***	11	<0.001***
Body Size	16.9	<0.001***	13	<0.001***
Activity Period	1.8	0.1	1.9	0.1
Terrestriality	0.3	0.8	-0.2	0.8
Folivory	-2.2	<0.05*	0.1	0.9
Group Size	1	0.3	0.1	0.9
Home Range Size	1.3	0.2	2.5	<0.05*
Model summary:				
λ		.99		1
R^2		.81		.75

579
580
581
582
583
584
585
586
587
588
589
590
591
592
593
594

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

RB and LP conceived of the project and wrote the manuscript; LP and KI collected the data; LP and RB analysed the data. All authors gave final approval for publication.

DATA ACCESSIBILITY

The data supporting this article (which are not available directly from the literature) have been uploaded as electronic supplementary material.

COMPETING INTERESTS

We declare no competing interests.

FUNDING STATEMENT

LP is funded by a Durham Doctoral Studentship provided by the University of Durham.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical approval was not required.